

Female Victimisation and Resistance in Alobwed'Epie's Trilogy: *The Lady With A Beard, The Lady With The Sting and She Seized The Balls*

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Abstract

This paper examines how male characters in the corpus use tradition as a pretext to suppress female characters. The paper also demonstrates the challenges they face in their struggle with female protagonists. Feminism constitutes the theoretical lens that will be used to analyze and interpret the texts under study. Feminism is a theory that advocates for the equality between men and women. According to feminists (de Beauvoir :1973, Gunew and Yeatman :1994, Tyson :2006) women are considered as social actors with specific characteristics which ought to be taken in account singularly. The problem the research addresses is one of representation of women in the corpus. Female characters are oppressed and victimized. The study is premised on the hypothesis that patriarchal norms are responsible for the subjugation of female characters who in turn fight back by performing roles that are known to be male in the society in which they live. The novels form a trilogy composed of *The Lady with a Beard, The Lady with the Sting and She Seized the Balls*. In this corpus, women are victims of male chauvinism. Male chauvinism is the belief that men are superior to women. According to *Cambridge Dictionary*, it is the "belief that women are naturally less important, intelligent, or able than men, and should be treated differently". The trilogy provides great examples of mechanisms of hegemony, subordination and marginalisation through the representation of its male characters. In the fictional world which the texts depict, men denigrate women in the belief that they are inferior to them and thus deserve less treatment or benefit. What accounts for this belief is the patriarchal order imposed by the tradition of the Bakossi land. The study concludes that male characters manipulate social traditions to maintain inequality in gender relations but meet the opposition of women who are determined to express themselves.

Key words: *Male Chauvinism, Patriarchy, Female Oppression, Resistance.*

Introduction

This paper examines how male characters in the corpus use tradition as a pretext to suppress female characters. Premised on the assumption that patriarchal norms are responsible for the subjugation of female characters who in turn fight back by performing roles that are known to be male in the society in which they live, the study uses feminism as the theoretical lens to analyse and interpret the texts under study. Feminism advocates

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the equality between men and women. According to feminists, women are considered as social actors with specific characteristics which ought to be taken in account singularly. The problem the research addresses is one of representation of women in the corpus. Female characters are oppressed and victimized. The texts provide great examples of mechanisms of hegemony, subordination and marginalisation through the representation of its male characters. In the fictional world which the texts depict, men denigrate women in the belief that they are inferior to them and thus deserve less treatment or benefit. In the meantime, a cursory look into the novels will situate the corpus in the context of this study and will also ease the grasp of the subject in question.

The Lady with a Beard is a novel set in the mid 1950s in the Bakossi land of the South West region of Cameroon. The novel presents a lady named Emade, a widow and victim of an enslaving and conservative society. She is controlled by the patriarchal forces of the Ateig men. They plot to remove her from her late husband's compound into the village center as they believe it is not appropriate for a widow with her baby to be far from the rest of the people in the community. But she resists this decision from the village men and as a consequence she is summoned. She is determined to fight for herself and her daughter as she lays hope in God who is the only one who can save her and her only child. Her resistance against patriarchal norms and her involvement in tasks known to be performed by men earns her the name "the lady with a beard".

The Lady with the Sting is a sequel to *The Lady with a Beard*. The novel follows the story of Ntube, the daughter of Emade in the prequel, who is betrothed to Ewang-Ename, a man from Bakossi land. Emade sees the man to be her daughter's husband according to the demands of culture. Rather, Ntube shows no interest in Ewang-Ename and prefers Mr. Nsahbilan, a school teacher from the Nso tribe. She eventually expresses her wish to get married to him but faces opposition from her mother. Emade throws insults and curses on Ntube, and the Nso people accuses Nsahbilan of committing an abomination by getting married to a Bakossi girl. This gives rise to conflicts in the novel because men of both tribes believe that the societal values have been breached. At the end of the novel, Ntube plays an outstanding role as she rejects male dominance and other cultural aspects of the tradition that subject the woman.

She Seized the Balls is the sequel to *The Lady with a Beard* and *The Lady with the Sting*. The novel depicts the struggles, achievements and successes of Ntube. She is loved and admired in the society by most women who come to spend time with her. She embarks on developmental projects which virtually transforms the clan. As she carries on with her activities, she gains the approval of the entire clan, the elders, women and the chiefs who not only gives her a place in the men's council but also gives her the power to pour libation and crown sub-chiefs. When some men accuse the chief of Atieg for giving her more power despite her gender, he openly tells them that if Ntube has any power, then she seized the balls in their presence, hence the title of the novel, *She Seized the Balls*. The novels making up the trilogy are set in an imaginary patriarchal society where traditions and customs are put in place in such a way that men remain in power positions. The law of the clan is fixed by traditional council which is made up of elder men. This situation shows that the Bakossi men exploit tradition to encourage domination. Therefore, the problem the research raises is one of representation of women who are oppressed and victimized by the patriarchal order.

The Oppressive Forces of Patriarchy

Edwin Mullins in *The Painted Witch: Female Body, Male Art*, remarks that “a woman is ... whatever man chooses to label her: she cannot deny it because there, first in her line of ancestry, stands Eve – guilty, naked, and ashamed” (57). The above quotation sees the woman and everything associated with her actions as less important, dependent and counterproductive. This ideology has been inscribed on to literary texts with the result that there is one group of imaginative writing that perpetuates its pervasiveness and another that counters its sexism. In the Mbuogmut culture, traditions constitute an index of male dominance. At the centre of the novels the Paramount chief, other chiefs and the elders have as duty to uphold the traditions and customs. The conflict in the texts draws upon these traditions which are an all-male affair in terms of determination of roles. The chiefs and sages of the land are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the law of patriarchy is respected. The laws hold that women are not supposed to question the position imposed on them. However, the female characters who no longer tolerate this situation, fight to redefine their role in the patriarchal society. This explains why Emade is accused of violating her nature and the traditions of their land; and that results to her nicknaming as the “male lady” or “the lady with a beard”.

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In *The Lady with a Beard*, men of the Atieg village become weak when they come near new widows. Hunze notes that, the men failed to relocate Emade because she was a new widow. Driven by their carnal desires, male characters fail to achieve their duty as they feign being herbalist looking for herb or a stray goat around her compound just to have Emade in their beds. The men become soft and lenient towards women when they want to exploit them; Hunze is convinced that as Emade is no longer a new widow they will deal with her for questioning the tradition. In addition, the men of the Muabag village lose their authority before Emade when she declares to her sister Ahone that: "when you get to a village where men shriek to call each other, you call such husks men?" (35). It is really ironical for men who claim to be powerful yet shriek to call each other like women.

Furthermore, the men of Muabag are presented as lazy because of Emade who performs tasks reserved for men. According to the tradition of the Bakossi land, a woman is not supposed to play the drum and especially when it concerns announcing death. But Emade does that because the men failed to accomplish this duty which is theirs. Emade challenges them and says "give one of the drums and listen and you will discover that they can't drum. See that man, he hears the drum announcing death. He goes and takes his gourd of palm wine...of course it signifies the quest for wine and you call them men?" (38). Ahone later stresses this idea when she calls on Emade and Wobe to composed themselves and bury their sister/mother respectively because when she looks around, she finds that the men in the village are not able to help them. They simply sit and wait to be entertained. In the meantime, when the villagers discover Emade's talent of drumming, they request her to play as they are itchy to dance. In return, she turns down the request and ask them: "what are the men doing? Can't they drum? Is it the carrying of palm wine gourds all about what matters in a death ceremony? (66). When the opportunity is given to the men, they failed to play a pleasing tune, they see nothing wrong in the fact that Emade entertains them though she is a woman. So, since the men have become so incompetent, they are free to look elsewhere for entertainment, Emade believes. The women are proud and feel empowered that one of them own such a talent despite male chauvinism.

Through his female protagonists, Alobwed'Epie deconstructs patriarchal structures and discursive strategies, but also “participate in the reconstruction of ideal masculinity” (Sarah S. G Frantz & Katharina Rennhak, 2010: 2). This is evident in *The Lady with a Beard* where Mr. Okere the proud man, shows off drinks and food at the burial of Mechane his mother-in-law. He buys a coffin and four blankets, entertains the village till dawn in an attempt to seduce the village people. But he fails to plan his resources well as a man is supposed to do. At the celebration of the *Ngandu*, he is ashamed as the resources get exhausted and he is unable to provide a pig for the said ceremony. The narrator thus declares: “Mr. Okere paced the compound with a drooping head. He shrugged his shoulders at the thought of his deflated ego” (61). Although he asks the people a pig to borrow, none of them wills, meanwhile it is revealed that Kande has a price winning pig. The Muabag men and women are very selfish and exploitative. They abandoned Mechane to die alone and today they are at the service of their throat and they want to quote where tradition says people should be buried. When Emade digs her sister's grave, the men are outraged because it is done by a woman but are more furious because they will be deprived of the grave-digging entertainment. They exploit tradition to service their throat. This is also an affront and a challenge to manhood. Emade accuses these men of being opportunists who only want to take advantage of Wobe's hospitality. She tells them to their face that they neglected Mechane and should be ashamed of themselves. Emade thus dares anybody to dig a grave anywhere else in the compound but where she is digging. She finishes her challenge with the following: “this is not a woman digging a grave; this is a woman spitting in your faces” (46).

Ewang-Emane is accused of being nonchalant and too lukewarm as he allows a stranger to seize Ntube he was betrothed to from childhood. His friend Ejolle warns him that his wastage of time in owning Ntube will do him no good. He says: “if you want roasted pork to cool before you eat it, it may cool in somebody else's mouth. Food is never sour in the presence of two pigs” (18-19). From the above quotation, Ejolle is part of those men in his society who compares a lady to pork meant for consumption, without her say. He sticks to patriarchy who regard women as objects who should be owned by men. His predictions come true and as impulsive as he is, he suggests that Nsahbinla be well beaten, charged with adultery and Ntube seized from him.

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Men prejudice against women in the trilogy is also evident in traditional marriages. During such ceremonies, women do not have a voice, even in the choice of their lifetime partners. But Ntube defies this law and ends up single. An apt example here is the case of Ewang-Ename who is blamed for being responsible for what Ntube has become. For him, his failure to marry Ntube make them pay for Ntube's ruthlessness as he declares:

She would not have been what she is, if she were married to you. You lost her to Nsahbinla because your Catholic Church upbringing made you too conventional with her. Ntube, a mature girl came to your house, entered your bedroom and went out again day in day out as if cold blood ran in your vein. She realized it and once she got in contact with hot blood, you lost her. Whatever she has become should be blamed on you. (201)

In *The Lady with the Sting*, despite male chauvinistic attitude towards women, they are weak in the presence of women. This is the case with Mr. Nsahbinla who is infatuated by Ntube's beauty which renders him speechless. The narrator explains: "he trembled and quaked. His voice broke..." (6). It is really shameful that a teacher is vulnerable and weak before a lady like Ntube. Also, other men like the Secretary of State and the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister (PSPP) fall prey to Ntube's beauty; a situation that renders them weak and powerless. On her way to her husband's office in Buea, Ntube is invited by the Private Secretary. When she turns down his invitation, he says: "Ok tell me where I shall meet you in the evening... Buea is not cold in a car. I want us to stroll to Victoria" (89). Though Ntube tells him she is married, he does not give up the idea of owning her. He therefore decides to include Mr. Nsahbinla's name in the list of people recommended for emergency courses at Glasgow. He sends him abroad for two years as a strategy to own Ntube since Nsahbinla is an obstacle to his sexual desires. He uses his power to tackle this obstacle. However, Ntube persists in her refusal and stayed away from him when her husband finally travels abroad. But the Private Secretary still continued to hope as the narrator explains that "For three months, he combed all the nooks and cranny of Buea" (90) in search of Ntube and when he finally locates her, he says: "... your husband will be over there for two years. When you feel like it, contact me. I'll do all to keep you happy. Ok? Good bye" (90).

Men prejudice against women in the trilogy extends to the way male characters perceive female characters sexually. In *The Lady with the Sting*, Kome-Ekeme is a bully who attacks Ntube on her way to the mission. He harasses her sexually, seizes her basket and enters the bush for her to follow him there. Despite his “a tall bumpy-faced bully” (4) appearance, he is defeated by Ntube who hit him hard and inflict pain on him. Just like most men in the novels who are depicted as being weak, Kome is not an exception. He tells Ntube that: “so long as a goat has a neck, there must be a rope for it” (5). In this proverb, Kome compares Ntube to a goat because in the patriarchal society in which they live, men consider the women as mere sexual objects that should be tied down. Furthermore, just like Mr. Okere, Mr. Nsahbinla, Ntube’s “graffi” husband is proud and arrogant; he wants everybody in the Bakossi land to see how rich he has become. By displaying his wealth, he wants to prove to Emade and the whole Atieg village that Ntube made the right choice. He is also revengeful as he is planning to see the face of the Rev. Father who dismissed him some years back when he declares to Ntube: “...prove the Baseng mission that we are better off than all of them put together” (44). He goes to Atieg for the second time with an impressive convoy composed of a Man Diesel truck and three land rovers. His pride leads them to more complications because his convoy destroys the brook-of-the-serpent hence rendering Ntube’s cleansing more difficult. He instead disgraces the village by desecrating the shrine with his vehicle as Sango Nyamempango declares: “let me be candid to you, you have done more harm to this tribe than the church that burnt the artefacts of our ancestral spirits. I shan’t be able to cleanse you” (106). In the novel therefore, because of the denigration of females in the belief that they are inferior to males, the actions of men are less constructive than those of women. In this vein Alobwed’Epie is a feminist who undermines a binary society that “subordinates the female subject to the rule of patriarchal tyrants — fathers, husbands” (18) as Dolores Ortega affirms in “Deterritorialising patriarchal binary oppositions: Deleuze & Guattari, Virginia Woolf, Masculinities and Film Adaptations”.

Male prejudice against women is also manifested in the novel through the lies female characters are victims of when they succumb to the promises of their male counterparts. In *The Lady with the Sting*, Mr. Nsahbinla he promises Ntube he would die with her, therefore stopping her from returning to her mother. When she recovers from her second operation, her physical look is depreciated and that causes her partner to lose interest as

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the narrator affirms in the novel: "but Nsahbinla was nonchalant about her beauty. The amber of love had smouldered away in him" (103). He loses interest in Ntube and because of her inability to bear children, abandons her and gets himself a new wife to whom he gets marry in church. The cruel way in which he divorces Ntube causes the death of Emade who dies of shock. Though he is informed of Emade's death, he shows no sign of grief nor pity for Ntube, his former wife who disappointed her mother to follow him. At the end he is also cursed; he loses his Nso wife, his job and friends. He is paralyzed with no one to assist him. Ntube enters his ward and meets him with faeses; he defecates on himself like a baby and begs for Ntube's help and forgiveness.

Like Sango Mesumbe, Ewang-Ename feels some sympathy for the plight of Ntube, he assembles the villages that constitute the Mbuogmut clan (Atieg, Ekenzu, Ngolo, and Muabag) to solve Ntube's problem. Though she abandoned him for a "graffi" husband, he is not revengeful and wants to put an end to her sufferings when he declares: "I have decided to solve Ntube's problem" (131). He pleads for the assembly to help him in this task and demands them to help Ntube provide the necessary items Sango Nyamempango asked for her cleansing. The items include among other things: the foreleg of every state animal, the bones of an albino, thunder, the lock of hair and complete bone of a white man and Water from the male and female lakes of the Muanenguba Mountain. He argues that if Ntube is disgraced, then all of them are disgraced. He then moves on to draw the attention of the great parents that if they fail to solve Ntube's problem, they will be unable to tackle the problems of this generation. However, Ewang-Ename's prediction realised itself as the men fail to tackle Ntube's problem. In fact, the numerous items which are practically impossible for Ntube to get is another way of male prejudice against women, they plan to use the list to subdue Ntube and relegate her to the subordinate position where according to them she belongs.

At the center of this patriarchal tyranny is *Mue* Nzegge, a staunch traditionalist who does not want patriarchal traditions to be tampered with. He is self-centered because he refuses that the clan should help Ntube. He argues that Ntube's affair is delicate. For him they are stepping on a rotten banana and should reconsider their stand, when he notices that his speech has done its effect as the assembly remains speechless "he felt a tingling

glow of happiness overwhelm him. Emade had called him ‘thing’ some years back... now he was revenging” (137). He uses the tradition as a pretext to revenge against a death person instead of thinking of the common interest of the clan by solving their daughter’s problem. Ejolle rebukes this idea of abandoning Ntube and says *Mue Nzegge* is wicked. In this light, the wickedness and self-centeredness of male characters in the novel is portrayed in *Mue Nzegge*.

In *She Seized the Balls*, a sequel to *The Lady with the Sting* and *The lady with a Beard*, male characters concentrate all the powers of the land and use it to the detriment of female ones. A scene that demonstrates this aspect of male chauvinism is the court session in which the chiefs, custodian of the land, remain silent throughout Ntube’s judgment. They remain passive even when controversial issues about their tradition are raised; and simply shake their heads in defeat as the narrator notices while in the court that: “Sango Nzegge looked round to see if one of the sages would counter what Sango Ebonloh had said. Nobody spoke...” (42). It is ironical that men who claim supremacy sit quiet like women and cannot utter a word even when they are angry. Their incompetence in handling Ntube’s case makes them lose their authority before the whole clan as they blamed the chiefs and the collective sages of the land for compromising their collective powers. In addition, due to their failure to voice their opinion in the open assembly, they resume in attacking Ntube at night with witchcraft as Ntube confide in her godmother she has been having horrible nightmares, seeing masked men chasing her. Ntube also declares: “those who transform themselves into owls acknowledge defeat in open combat. And those who are defeated in the day can’t win in the night” (73).

Furthermore, both the HM and Mr. Nsahbinla her former husband are at their feet in front of Ntube. Mr. Nsahbinla kneels and kisses her feet while the HM constantly begs her each time, he speaks to her there is this hesitating “eh eh eh” which shows how much he feels insecure in Ntube’s company. This is ironical because according to the norms of their society, the men; the real ones do not beg a woman because it would be tantamount to his reputation and honour. Though the HM did not honor Ntube’s invitation to come and eat *sesse binage* for fear of compromising his reputation, but he finally shows up at Ntube’s compound three days later to eat the same stale *sesse*.

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Female Resistance and the Deconstruction of Patriarchal Order

In the novels under discussion, the heroines resist the chauvinistic behavior men demonstrate towards them. In such a gesture, they participate in the deconstruction of patriarchal order. Although the men claim power and authority over women in Atieg they once more fail to accomplish their task as protector of their land. They fail to protect the sacred grove at the heart of the village and directly behind the chief's palace. The Ngomboku boys seize this opportunity to penetrate the grove and steal the items of the aborted cleansing ritual. These items are valuable and very expensive on the market. They (the items) are required for the ritual of disposal but no longer exist. *Sango Nzegge* himself is scandalized at their disappearance wonders how they managed to penetrate the heart of their village unnoticed. Surprised, he questions: "Ngomboku boys? How did they get here? How could they penetrate our natural defenses?" (*She Seized the Balls* 9). They overslept like women and the items were stolen. Some of them even admit that they learned the Rev. Father was selling the items but did not bother to check. The sanction is levied on Ntube because she has to pay for challenging them and they plan to take her unaware so that "the hook of her intransigence would stick in her throat..." (*She Seized the Balls* 17). Not only do *Sango Nzegge* (who owes a personal grudge against Ntube and her mother) ask her to produce the items, but he also gives her a fine of "a cow with a tail" as she says: "eight rams, eight cocks, eight whiskies, eight gourd of palm wine and eight heads of tobacco" (*She Seized the Balls* 17). For them, she should either be punished or they will turn their back to their traditional values. A similar situation is presented in John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *The Widow's Might* where after the demise of the heroine's husband, Akwenoh, the widow, finds herself in a hybrid space informed by the forces of tradition and modernity. Ma Eseke, her late husband's sister informs her that she should sleep on bare floor while mourning her husband. However, some women, like the Global ladies recall that "the times have changed and some old practices had to be buried" (*The Widow's Might* 22). As soon as Akwenoh settles on the mattress, she is scorned by her sister-in-law, Ma Seke who rises from her seat to unseat Akwenoh from the mattress. But Akwenoh boldly replied to her: "Ma Seke, what is wrong sitting on a mattress? Please just leave me alone. It's my husband who's dead and not yours" (*The Widow's Might* 23).

Female resistance is further propelled through men are depicted as incompetent. An example of this incompetence is when the commission of nine men is set but proves unable to produce satisfactory answers to Ntube's poignant questions. They fail to come out with the answers because Ntube is honest and they are exploitative liars. Ejolle reminds Nzegge that the traditional doctors are the ones to keep the items and at the same time representatives of the same community asking Ntube to pay for the stolen items. Instead of providing solutions to the problem, they instead decide to mitigate the fine and reduce it to half the things she was initially fined for. Their decision is contested by Ntube, something which has never happened in the clan, as the narrator observes: "Never before had a person, let alone a woman, contested the decision of the nine" (*She Seized the Balls* 36). This contestation shattered the importance of the commission of nine laying therefore bare their weakness.

Moreover, Ebonloh just like Sango Mesumbe, Pele and Enang-Ename also feels some degree of sympathy for Ntube. These men are not insensitive to the plight of the women in their society and try as much as possible to help them. Ebonlo feels sorry for Ntube's wax-less predicament and decides to set her free. He orders the others to vomit Ntube which they ate in witchcraft. The cruelty of men is exposed here: Ebonloh reveals how they shared Ntube in witchcraft, therefore establishing their culpability in her sufferings. If not of their wickedness, she should have been a mother of an uncountable number of children living with her husband and maybe Emade would still be alive.

The men of Atieg believe the chief has given more power to Ntube and this explains why she is able not only to resist them, but also to perform task that are traditionally known to be men's tasks. In a bid to rebel against their chief whom they judged as being impotent in handling Ntube's affair, the village men decide to migrate to Ngomboku where they can practice their traditional values unperturbed. By so doing they are shortsighted because they do not realize they are exploited by the Ngomboku people on whose land they work and build houses, thus developing the area to the detriment of their own village. These village people borrow them land without asking for payment. However, as the men for the first time decide to take actions to defend their traditional values, they fail to demonstrate some maturity and sheepishly fall into the trap of the Ngomboku people. They express their gratitude to Ntube for enlightening them on this

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issue when Sango Nkwelle exclaimed: "A Ntube, you have once again removed the mass of glop, the cataract that impaired our vision..." (*She Seized the Balls* 256). From this quotation, the men acknowledge Ntube's wisdom and apologize for their stupid act of rebellion. They have been once more overpowered by a woman.

Female resistance in the face of male chauvinism is portrayed through the men of Atieg village who once again are seen to fail to voice their opinions in an open assembly but rather prefer to gossip outside like women. This is the case of *Sango Ndelle* and *Sango Esemé* who are against the idea of letting the women to take part in the pouring of libation ceremony. Though they are scandalized, they shy away from expressing their minds to the hearing of the assembly, they rather prefer to go out. *Sango Esemé* asks his friend if he is dreaming and says he prefers to die than to live and watch that happen. He also asks his friend what will they say when they reach the underworld. His friend *Sango Ndelle* simply tells him that the damage has already been done so they better go and sit so that they will not be deprived of the entertainment the ceremony will offer. He expresses his self-centeredness and greediness as he remarks: "Whatever they do will affect them not us. How long shall we live again? When they give us our little food and drinks, we take. That is what we should live for now..." (*She Seized the Balls* 261). The above quotation reveals the cowardness and hypocrisy of Atieg men in particular and those of the Mbuogmut clan in general. When the assembly waits for their return and asks them if they have something to add, they simply say they have nothing to add, therefore allowing the chief to continue with what they consider as an abomination.

In the meantime, male chauvinism in the trilogy can be seen through the use of metaphoric language in the trilogy. Proverbs constitute one way of staging masculinity in the texts under study. According to the Oxford Advanced Dictionary a proverb is a short popular saying usually in the form of a moral advice or truth expressed in a concise form.

In *The Lady with a Beard*, Ahone reminds Emade that "a spear that misses the target, does not miss the ground" (71) the spear here refers to men or the tradition/patriarchy; and the target here refers to Emade or any other woman who dares to defy the tradition. In this proverb, Ahone redefines the role of women in the patriarchal society, a society that

accords more privileges to men than women. This role of women was imposed by men and should not be questioned. This explains why she tells her sister to be careful with the tradition since men will not tolerate any challenge against it. They may go to the extent of attacking her daughter if that will help them maintain their supremacy as the tradition requires.

Also, Ahone draws Emade attention with the following proverb “the urine of a woman especially that of a widow can never cross a beam” (100). This proverb illustrates male chauvinism in that it reiterates male hegemony in all the aspects of the society. states that no matter how powerful or intelligent a woman is she remains a woman and cannot have a say in the society. It also recalls that men dictate the traditions and the women simply obey them without questioning.

Furthermore, in *The Lady with the Sting*, chief Enongene notes that “if a little snake is big enough to cross the road, then it is big enough for its head to be cut” (169). The little snake represents Ntube. According to the Chief she should be punished for daring to defy the tradition. And for the rest of men, Ntube should be given a good lesson for defying the tradition as her action may prompt other women to question the tradition of the land and hence put an end to patriarchy.

The men are very conscious of the fact the tradition serves them best and therefore are not ready to surrender the advantages derived from it even though they have remained passive. This is the case with Sango Ntioge the chief celebrant who, while performing rituals to displace the crocodile says: “the cock have overslept eee and so the hens have crowed eee...” (25). Through this proverb, he lays more emphasis on the incompetence of men who according to him have overslept, giving therefore a chance for women to express themselves. Ntube and her mother have proved to be competent enough to take decisions on their own and not to depend on men. Though they claim to be superior to other women, it is either ironical they fail in almost all the aspects in demonstrating their masculine prioress. This failure is due to the patriarchal order imposed by their tradition.

In *She Seized the Balls*, Sango Nzegge observes that “a cock that uses its valuable time preening its feathers forgets that it has a territory to defend against unforeseen enemies. Once it is attacked, it keeps the feathers but loses the fight and the territory...” (8). Ntube

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in this proverb is referred to as the unforeseen enemy; the cock represents the men and the territory, the chauvinism and sexism they use in oppressing the women. They prevent Ntube from tampering with the tradition and that explains why Sango Nzegge proceeds by remarking that: "we may live to regret our lukewarm-ness about Ntube's affair" (8). The proverb above also shows how women assert themselves in the presence of men. It is evident from this proverb that in the Mbuogmut clan, women are believed to be silent listeners. They are supposed to listen and obey only. They have no right to question or protest any decision taken about them.

Another proverb that epitomizes male prejudice against women in the trilogy is when Sango Nzegge alludes to Ntube's masculinity as he observes that "if we had blown our noses and wiped our hands, we would have long forgotten that we ever had a catarrh attack" (131). Ntube is compared to a catarrh attack that has to be blown away for patriarchy to reign. By implication therefore, the men wield all power and authority and are always in control. Catarrh is an air born disease that is very contagious so Ntube is seen as a catarrh attacked that should be wiped out fast before it creates further devastating effects to the hegemonic masculinity put in place by the men for their advantage.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, male chauvinism in the trilogy is enhanced by the patriarchal order imposed by the tradition of the Bakossi land. Unfortunately, male characters use the powers invested on them by tradition to suppress and oppress their counterparts of the female gender. They denigrate women in the belief that they are inferior to them and thus deserve less treatment or benefit. The women fight back as they prove through their actions that the treatment, they receive from men is not only unjust but exploitative. They demonstrate their determination to assert themselves by performing in the community the tasks usually assigned to men. In this move, they deconstruct the very system that subjugate them by resisting all forms of masculinities.

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